

**MISSIOLOGICAL MUSINGS:
PUTTING LAST THINGS FIRST**
*PART 2 OF 2 OF THE CRITICAL KINGDOM QUESTIONS*¹

*By John Span*²

1 Introduction

In 1985 I had the privilege of accompanying a veteran Bible smuggler to Cuba. By God's favor we were able to visit numerous churches with the Bibles and Sunday school materials that the officer at the airport had miraculously not seen in our luggage. One visit was particularly notable, especially after seeing the continual bombardment that the youth received about creating a new society, and having Che Guevara and Fidel as the models of the 'new man'.

In an area seemingly forgotten to the outside world, we visited a pastor who received our Sunday school materials with a joy unspeakable. It was the first of its kind they had had in their hands since the 1958 revolution. You should have seen his face. His story to us made a deeper impression, however.

'Our school children are obliged to attend government schools. There they are continually reminded of the blood of the martyrs of the revolution, and that they must live to overthrow the evil imperialistic empire, while creating the perfect society on earth. God is bigger than all of that.'

'How so?', we wondered.

¹ Part 1 was in the April issue of the St. Francis Magazine. I am indebted to two sources for my title. The first is an article by Tim Chester, 'Putting Last Things First: The importance of eschatology for Christian living and mission', *From Athens to Jerusalem* (Vol. 2/3 Spring 2001) and the second is a book by John V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology*. (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2007). Both texts show the vital link between victorious Christian living and a Biblical eschatology.

² John Span is a missionary in West Africa with Christian Reformed World Missions.

‘Many of our young people are having visions, even while they are awake, of scenes from the book of Revelation. They see themselves bathing in the river that flows from God’s throne, and they see themselves dressed in radiant and bright clothing. They see that this perfect society that Fidel is trying to create is nothing.’

This story left an indelible impression on me. It demonstrates that a vision is powerful, and that it has the ability to influence present behavior. Whereas Fidel had one vision to influence Cuba, God had a greater one for his children. It enabled them to look beyond their present situation.

The basis of this paper then is to argue that a future vision is a powerful determinant for present behaviour or strategy. It argues that starting at the end, and working backwards, in the case of the consummated kingdom, has some powerful antidotes for some current missiological thinking or perhaps tinkering, especially in the Muslim world. It addresses the question that we raised in part 1 of this paper, ‘Can a person be identified with the Kingdom of God and Islam at the same time?’

2 Why work backwards? The end justifies the means or the end controls the means.

Present mission strategy seems to have many of its roots in the scientific method. It makes observations. It collects these observations into useful categories, and then draws some conclusions. Doubtless, much wisdom can be gathered in this fashion. It uses God-given logic, observational skills, and presupposes an ordered universe.

This might be called the forward approach.

For all of its strengths, there seem to be two subtle dangers with this approach. First of all, since the observer is so closely involved with the observation, might their approach be somewhat clouded? Might the assumptions they bring to making the observation even determine what they should or might be looking for? The second danger occurs when these observations, or descriptions, become pre-

scriptions. This is far too easy in a world enamored with results and in which the end justifies the means. In the business of missiology, things get even trickier when such prescriptions are justified by creating a theology to substantiate them.

If this all sounds too theoretical, bear with me for a moment. A correspondent wrote to me and suggested that the use of the Muslim term 'Isa was justified in Bible translation due to the fact that more Bibles using this term were sold in a particular country than those not using this term. Case closed, *n'est ce pas?* The sales volume observation was likely solid. But what of the conclusion? It is built on the premise that sales show that the word used in translation is necessarily justified, and even theologically so. Perhaps. Perhaps not. Other factors would have to be measured.

What about a 'last things first' approach?

In this approach, we would start at the end and work towards the present.³ Some have called this 'end-visioning'. It is common in missions' literature to observe the end-vision of the multi-ethnic group of worshippers before the throne in Rev 7:9. This is an excellent start as it takes visioning beyond what we can dream up, to what has already been revealed. Often, however, vision focuses solely on the diversity of the group, and does not explore the qualities of the group.

Taking this one step further, this paper will explore the vision of the New Jerusalem. Like the 'worshipper vision' above, one gains a point of reference removed from one's present situation that hopefully will provide a measure of objectivity. The end becomes the standard by which present observations are measured. Even more so, it is the end that now controls the means. Thus, for instance, when we look at the picture of the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven, im-

³ This is the approach taken by Daniel Strange in his article entitled, 'The Theology of the end and the end of theology'. Originally in *From Athens to Jerusalem*, Vol. 3, Issue 5, (Spring 2003) www.beginningwithmoses.org/bigger/ds_theologyend.htm (2007/9/24)

mediately we are struck with the fact that this is not a wise and wonderful plan hatched by an earthling or a group of them. Its origin is other-worldly. For good reason Jesus, in Rev 3:12, calls this the city that belongs to God and is ‘coming down from my God’. This might challenge us to examine the source of our strategies. Without falling into a dualistic trap, would our ways of doing things bear greater reflection on a ‘heaven-sent’ source or from an ‘earth-dwellers’ source?

We would also observe that the New Jerusalem, or the consummated kingdom of God, finally fulfills the human cry for true community, true intimacy with God, and true security. Some forward approaches, however, appear to take short cuts in trying to achieve such. Consider the strategies that use methods to minimize the potential pain of the loss of biological/religious community on this earth as if that was all there is.

A legitimate question relating to this ‘last things first’ approach concerns the danger of falling into the common trap that theologians call an ‘over-realized eschatology’ or in simple terms ‘pie in the sky’.

3 The text: Revelation 21 and 22:1-5

With all of the tools of apocalyptic and the Hebrew prophetic tradition at his disposal, John the inspired writer of the book of Revelation, helps us to see ‘what must soon take place’. From a mountain vantage point common to the apocalyptic genre, we are introduced to symbolism that defies imagination.⁴ Metaphors abound and get mixed and mashed as we see a city in perfect cube shape with sides each measuring 2400 kilometers, with a surface area of more than 5

⁴ George B. Caird noted, ‘the measurements of the city show how much John cared for the symbolism and how little for mathematics’, in *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper's New Testament commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 273.

million square kilometers descending from heaven. Gigantic city foundation stones, normally not visible, dedicated to apostolic witness, are displayed and make a satirical statement about the gaudiness of the jewelry of the ‘un-wife’ Babylon, the prostitute who now lies in a smoking heap. One must almost shield their eyes in the presence of the dazzling purity of the bride, dressed as it were, with fine linen and wearing a necklace of precious stones and pearls; and the intensity of the proximity of the presence of the wife of the Lamb and her celestial husband. The lavishness is almost throw-away: gold is paving material; diamond-like jewels are building material; crystal pure water which we bottle flows in rivers; fruit is perpetual and all the signs of our present pains are conspicuously absent.

This is what Steven Baugh recognized as the consummated kingdom where all of God’s purposes have come to fulfillment. He describes this realm and rule as:

The kingdom of God proper is the fully consummated new heavens and new earth inhabited by the redeemed resurrected saints in glory and incorruptibility where the Triune God including the incarnate Son triumphantly rules supreme.⁵

Similarly J.I. Packer shows that salvation, re-creation, glorification and the kingdom of God all tie into each other. In his leaflet, ‘The Plan of God’ he notes that the main theme of the Bible is ‘not human salvation, but the work of God vindicating His purposes and glorifying Himself in a sinful and disordered cosmos by establishing His kingdom and exalting His Son, by creating a people to worship and serve Him, and ultimately by dismantling and re-assembling this order of things, so rooting sin out of His world entirely.’⁶

⁵ Steve Baugh, ‘The Kingdom of God in the New Testament’, at Christ, Kingdom and Culture Seminar, Westminster California Seminary, 21 January 2010, see <http://netfilehost.com/wscal/Conferences/2010/baughdl.mp4> (2010/2/1).

⁶ J.I. Packer, ‘The Plan of God’, on www.the-highway.com/plan_Packer.html (2010/6/21), Originally published in 1961 by *Evangelical Press*.

Rather than a verse by verse exegesis of the passage, I would like to highlight a few items that could serve in an illustrative way for this “last things first” model. They will be arranged by a number of statements drawn from the text, namely ‘I saw/was shown’; ‘there will no longer be’; ‘he/I will’; ‘but’ and ‘new’.

3.1 Two ‘I saw/I was shown’ statements

3.1.1 *...the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (21:2)*

Old Jerusalem or Zion represented the place where God met with his people, where the nations came to worship him, where the king ruled.⁷ In short, it was as close to heaven as one could get. But it was a foreshadowing of something much better. In this vision John sees Jerusalem the renewed city as a renewed community, with heavenly origins coming down to earth. More than that, in true apocalyptic style John mixes his metaphors and the city becomes the bride of the Lamb, becomes an ‘un-temple’, becomes the new Zion with the dwelling place of God and the saints and becomes a lush, new Eden.

God has taken the city motif which sprang up in the Babel desire to be independent of Him, and has completely transformed it. The corporate rebellion and hardness of heart against him have been morphed into resplendent life and communion.

3.1.2 *... I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb (21:9)*

As we noted, superlatives are piled on top of each other to communicate the breathtaking beauty of this bride unveiled. Precious and rare stones, gigantic pearls, other-worldly gold, radiant and shimmering light from its source in God, perfect symmetry and completeness in

⁷ Jerusalem has been called the ‘Holy City’ (Isa 48:2), ‘the City of God or the Lord’ (Ps 46:4; 87:3; 101:8), ‘the City of the Lord Almighty’ (Ps 48:8), ‘the Beautiful City’ (Ps 48:2), ‘the City of the Great King’ (Ps 48:2; Matt 5:35), and ‘Zion, the City, our Safe Place’ (Isa 33:20 LXX). All of these appear in the passage at hand.

every respect stand in sharp contrast to the ‘un-wife’, the prostitute Babylon (chapters 17-18). The poignancy of this image must have struck home to the church at Smyrna, known for undergoing and living in temporary poverty. It would also sound a warning to the Laodicean church that had grown rich and complacent by selling out to the economic system of Rome. Laodicea’s wealth and status would look pitiful compared to this opulence.

Observation: This almost utopian vision of how things will end was the impetus for the heroes of faith of the book of Hebrews and Revelation to set their sights on. It was this better and lasting city that pulled them forward and upward. Because its architect and builder was God, its enduring qualities were guaranteed.

This raises a question. As it is in vogue to belittle the Bride, the wife of the Lamb in her present state, i.e. the church visible, what does that say about our vision for the end. Do we actually believe in this beauty that is to be revealed? Do we actually believe in having foretastes of the lush new Eden?

3.2 Four ‘there will no longer be’ statements

3.2.1 ... the sea (22:1)

The sign of primeval chaos (Gen 1:2), rebellion against God and an agent of his judgments will disappear. More than a geographical statement, it is a theological statement. It tells of the radical discontinuity with the old creation. The place where the beast came from (Rev 13:1) no longer exists. It is the beast who inspired the nations to war against the saints (12:18; 17:1–6). The elements which cause the saints to suffer, no longer exist and this would be a source of hope to the persecuted audience of the book of Revelation. Even punitive judgment itself will disappear.

3.2.2 ... *death, or grief, or crying, nor will there be pain anymore, because the first things passed away* (22:4)

Just as the sea, the place of the dead will no longer exist; all the painful effects of the punishment for the cosmic treason of Adam and Eve will no longer exist. This was especially poignant to the audience who had mourned over those temporary casualties due to the “war on the saints” (Rev. 13:7). They had witnessed the beheading of their colleagues for their faithful testimony (20:4) who had not loved their present lives, even to the point of being willing to die (12:11).

3.2.3 ... *curse* (22:3)

When the Israelites were to take over the land of Canaan, God gave orders to devote to destruction certain cities and towns (Jos 6:17). These represented pagan culture and worship at their worst. God sent a message that judgment had come after numerous years of grace. Additionally it was a means of protecting Israel from the potential lure of foreign gods. They were to be entirely destroyed.

In the Apocalypse, John observes that this practice (Gk. *katathe-ma*) is no more. Zech 14:11 has been fulfilled: ‘And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security.’ The old creation has been completely purged of all pagan influences and the general influences of the Adamic curse. The slaughtered Lamb, who Himself was devoted to destruction by taking the curse of sin on Himself, now takes his royal place. Thus, the poignancy of the conjunction ‘but’. ‘The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it [i.e. the New Jerusalem], and his servants will worship him.’

3.2.4 ... *night* (21:25; 22:5; c.f Gen 1:2, Col 1:13)

‘For you have been rescued out of the kingdom of darkness.’ Anything to do with the kingdom of darkness has been erased.

Observation: These four, out of seven in total, ‘no longer’ raise a question as to the attitude of God towards those elements which rise

up in rebellion against him. This includes foreign religions. As much as he gave the adherents a limited time of grace in the OT, one cannot imply that he approved of their practices. Eventual elimination was the mandate. John observed the completion of this mandate.

If the end shows the destiny of foreign religions, why are some claiming that they are more benign and more harmless than they actually are? Might this not influence our views in the present?

3.3 Four 'he/I will' statements

3.3.1 ... dwell among them, and they will be his people (21:3)

The Celestial husband will be with his bride at last. They will live together eternally. Gone are the days when Israel as the wife of YHWH had proved to be spiritually adulterous, and had 'prostituted herself' with foreign gods. Gone are the days when the Bride of Christ, the church, looked sometimes flirtatiously at the world and at other times was beaten black and blue by jealous thugs due for her dedication to Husband. Here perfect marital bliss reigns. Not a sensual paradise, but shared presence. As Isbon Beckwith said concerning this beatific vision, 'The supreme felicity is reached, immediate presence with God and the Lamb.'⁸ The cry for perfect community is finally realized. The twelve continually open gates in this city symbolize access to the presence of God, which is the ultimate inheritance of the saints. This is the ultimate Sabbath rest.

3.3.2 ... wipe away each and every tear from their eyes (21:4)

As much as the bride had endured much pain prior to this time, her loving husband will remove all vestiges of this pain. 'Each and every' tear is no hyperbole.

⁸ Isbon Thaddeus Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction, with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1922), p. 766.

3.3.3 ... give freely to drink (21:6)

Just as the Hebrew husband would take his wife home and provide her with shelter, clothing and protection, here we see the same. This is no miserly God, meting out rewards reluctantly, but the Lamb, the bridegroom who lavishes good things on his own, the object of his love, out of sheer and abundant grace.

3.3.4 ... I will be a God to him and he will be a son to me (21:7)

A promised heritage for the overcomer was the ultimate prize: God Himself. The Apocalypse in many ways is a handbook for the overcomer. In 14:12 we read, ‘Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.’ Implied in this victor term is the potential for cowardice and defeat in battle. God promises that the overcomer would have the same title as the Ultimate overcomer, namely Jesus, the Son of God. Unlike the Emperor Augustus who had taken on the title, ‘a savior who put an end to war and brought order to all things’⁹, Jesus actually and finally fulfilled the right rulership that Adam, his offspring, Israel and its kings (all called ‘the sons of God’) had abdicated. The New Jerusalem shows that under the Lamb’s rulership, he is indeed the Savior, who put an end to war and brought order to all things.

Observation: Promises and more promises, guaranteed by the one who literally says, ‘They have become reality’. He then reinforces this by calling Himself the beginning and the end—the Alpha and Omega (v. 6). To the still doubting He says, ‘These words are trustworthy and true.’ (v. 5) To the still doubting, the origin of the voice is said to be from control room of heaven, ‘the throne’.

Mounce comments: ‘There is no uncertainty about the eternal felicity of those who hold fast in the trial of faith because from God’s

⁹ Steven J. Friesen *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 176.

vantage point the future is determined.’¹⁰ This raises a question: Does our strategy of outreach to Muslims reflect confidence in these promises? Or might a subtle unbelief inform them?

3.4 Two ‘but’ statements

3.4.1 ... as for the cowardly, the faithless...

Theologians call this the beginning of a standardized list of vices, or, for short, a ‘vice catalog/list’. A quick reading might suggest that these are pagans who have never graced a church, and so they get their rightful place in the lake of fire. No less than seven reputed commentators on the Apocalypse, however, point out the sober reality that this is a way by negation for John to encourage the overcomers.¹¹ Simply put, the consequences of trying to play both sides of

¹⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* The New international commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 374.

¹¹ Mounce, p. 375 notes that ‘Leading the retreat are the cowardly, who in the last resort choose personal safety over faithfulness to Christ’; G. K. Beale states: ‘They are those in the visible community of faith who have “turned back in the holy war” with the world and have not demonstrated courageous faith in the battle against the beast.’ *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), p. 1059; Grant R. Osborne suggests that ‘this first term probably describes those in the church who fail to persevere but give in to the pressures of the world.’ *Revelation*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 741; M.E. Boring goes a little bit farther and notes that this vice list starts with cowards and ends with liars. He suggests that this portrays the ‘failures of Christians under the pressure of persecution and threat of it: lack of courage before the Roman courts, lack of truthfulness regardless of the consequences’ and the other vices as indicative of succumbing to emperor worship and capitulation to pagan society. M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 217. Brian Blount echoes the same: ‘Cowards are the ultimate accommodationists; for fear of losing social standing, economic wealth, physical well-being, and perhaps even life, they surrender their witness to God’s lordship and testify to the Lordship of Caesar and Rome instead’. in *Revelation: A Commentary* New Testament Library (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 383. See also Pilchan Lee, *The New*

the fence when the going gets tough, will be nasty, and eternal. John states that it is better to suffer martyrdom than to take the easy road of collusion with, or caving into the empire. These ‘cowardly’ says Beasley-Murray, are those who ‘fear the threats of the beast more than they trust the love of Christ’.¹² By a solemn warning, he is directing his audience back to the promises made to overcomers in the seven churches of Rev 2 and 3.

3.4.2 ... *nothing unclean will enter it*

In keeping with the virgin-pure, ‘spotless and without wrinkle’ (Eph 5:27) picture of bride of Christ, John draws some lines in the sand. This is not only sacred space due to the presence of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (22:3) but it is a sacred community, rightfully called ‘The holy city’. The ceremonial purity laws of the OT are in force, but with much greater vigor. Only those written in the Lamb’s book of life can enter (v. 27). With a great deal of comfort, this same Lamb who says he will ‘blot away every single tear’, said to the overcomers in 3:5 that he would dress them in the opposite of unclean-ness, namely a white garment, and that he would never ‘blot them out’ of his book of life.

Those battered saints of the Apocalypse have the complete security in the New Jerusalem. It is free from attacks from without by its angelic watchmen at the gates, perimeter walls, and free from attack from within by false teachers and false prophets of a Jezebel like-nature (c.f. Rev 2.20). Gundry notes that this great and high wall

Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21-22 in the Light of Its Background in Jewish Tradition (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), p. 275 who sees victors and martyrdom set in opposition to cowards and liars. Similarly Robert L. Thomas, highlights the fact that this list has parallels to the I Cor 6:9-10 list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), pp. 450-451.

¹² Cited by Mounce, p. 314.

provided a ‘total absence of anxiety over persecution such as loom on the old earth’.¹³

Observation: The letters to the seven churches address the universal tendency to syncretism, to cowardice and to avoidance of suffering. The vision of the New Jerusalem gives ample promises for those who have rigorously avoided syncretism, have embraced suffering for the sake of Christ and have fled from a cowardice that measures temporary gain over eternal gain.

One must ask if present strategies view cowardice and uncleanness with the same view as the Apocalypse.

3.5 Two ‘new’ statements

(see above for ‘new Jerusalem’ and ‘making all things new’)

3.5.1 ... new heaven and a new earth (21:1).

For the word new, John uses the word ‘kainos’ which might be said to be ‘qualitatively new’ or something new that has its origin in the old. Still theologians have wrangled over the differences between a replaced or renovated new heavens and new earth. Some appeal to the prophecy of Isaiah who said: ‘For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind’ (Isa 65:17) which seems to imply replacement. Others like the church father Irenaeus said that the new reality corresponds to the ‘New Man whose renovation has been completed by the resurrection’.¹⁴ Thus Jesus had a new resurrection body which was still material and he could eat fish, but it had immaterial properties that allowed him to walk through walls. Here we see continuity and discontinuity with his old body.

¹³ R. H. Gundry, ‘The New Jerusalem: People as Place not Place for People’, *Novum Testamentum*, 29 (1987), p. 260.

¹⁴ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: MacMillan, 1911), p. 275.

Paul said in second Corinthians 5:17, 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.'

3.5.2 ... the 'new Eden' with the 'New Adam'

Whereas the first Adam and his spouse took their mandate to be rulers in God's stead and abused their privilege, those who have been engrafted into the Lamb, the New Adam, have the right to reign in the new Eden. Whereas Adam and Eve took their priestly role in the garden-temple and forfeited it, those engrafted into Christ the great High Priest, now have the right to reign as priests. (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6)¹⁵ Therefore, along with the Lamb and the Lord God Almighty who sit as One on the throne (21:22; 22:3), they will 'reign forever and ever'. (22:5) Theirs will be the new Edenic Zion which is a garden city. It has the fruitfulness and life of a lush garden, and the community of the ideal city.

Observation: The new so overshadows the old that the old almost fades into oblivion. J. Sweet speaks of the 'glorious new city for which that slum-clearance made room.'¹⁶ Almost a century ago, Henry Swete described this newness as 'fresh life rising from the decay and wreck of the old world'.¹⁷ It is for this reason that the contrast of light and the absence of darkness or night dominate the symbolism.

¹⁵ Commentators have observed that the duties of Adam to 'work' and 'keep' the garden (Genesis 2:15) are the same verbs used together to describe the duties of a Levitical priest (Numbers 3:7-8, 4:23-26, 8:26, 18:5-6).

¹⁶ John Philip Mcmurdo Sweet, *Revelation* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 301 cited by Gordon Campbell, 'Antithetical Feminine-Urban Imagery and a Tale of Two Women-Cities in the Book of Revelation', in *Tyndale Bulletin* 55 (2004), p. 98.

¹⁷ Swete, p. 275.

3.6 Synopsis

In three words, the consummated kingdom is characterized by true community, true intimacy with God, and true security. Underlying these are qualities of exclusivity, purity, newness built on foundations of the old, life, lavish adornment, security, durability, provision, radiance, beauty, completeness, innocence, and perfection. The old Eden and the old Jerusalem are eclipsed. As much as there is a small level of conceptual continuity with the old Eden, the old Jerusalem and items like trees, water and precious stones from the old creation, discontinuity dominates the picture.

In the same shape as the holy of holies the New Jerusalem demonstrates that the perfected saints will not only have a place of perfection, they will be a place of perfection. As Gundry says, they constitute ‘the ultimate in-group’ who due to their decision to distance themselves from the sins of Babylon (18.4) are presently ‘outsiders.’¹⁸ This kingdom turns things inside out. Barr describes the book of Revelation as one in which ‘lambs conquer...suffering rules...victims .. become the victors.’¹⁹

4 Testing the model

We recall the anecdote: A correspondent wrote to me and suggested that the use of the Muslim term ‘Isa was justified in Bible translation due to the fact that more Bibles using this term were sold in a particular country than those not using this term.

Using the ‘last things first’ model we might ask the following sample questions, which could also be applied to other present missiological practices:

¹⁸ Gundry, p. 261.

¹⁹ David L. Barr, ‘The Apocalypse as a symbolic transformation of the world: a literary analysis’, in *Interpretation*, 38 no 1(Ja 1984), p. 50.

- a. Is the use of the Muslim name 'Isa [or an associated practice] an attempt at emphasizing continuity at the expense of discontinuity?
- b. Does the use of the name 'Isa [or an associated practice] have anything to do with a larger pluralistic trend to dulling down the exclusivity of the consummated kingdom of God?
- c. Does the name 'Isa [or an associated practice] do justice to the unique worship demanded by the heavenly bridegroom? The Lamb got to his position of exaltation by being the 'Lamb led to the slaughter' (Isaiah 53).
- d. Might the use of this name [or associated practice] be an inadvertent tie in to cowardice or the rest of the vice list? Conversely, does it contribute to the formation of overcomers?²⁰ These are described in Rev 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12 as those who actively resist evil even when short-term success is not guaranteed.
- e. Might this name [or practices associated with it] have fallen under the curse?
- f. Might the use of this name [or associated practice] be a way to look for security and community that can only be realized in the consummated kingdom?
- g. The city is built on the foundation stones of the apostolic witness of the church. It is also the embodiment of the Bride of Christ, which is the universal church. Do these voices have a say as to the appropriateness of the term [or practice]?²¹

²⁰ *Hypomonē*: '[...] refers overwhelmingly — and positively — to independent, unyielding, defiant perseverance in the face of aggressive misfortune, and thus to a kind of courageousness; in the negative sense it refers also to the enduring of humiliation.' W. Radl in Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translation of: *Exegetisches Wörterbuch Zum Neuen Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-c1993), p. 3:405.

²¹ See, for example Felise Tavo, *Women, Mother, and Bride: An Exegetical Investigation into the 'Ecclesial' Notions of the Apocalypse* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006).

- h. The city has an out-of-heavenly origin as its ‘builder and maker is God’ (Heb. 11:10). What is the origin of this term [or practice]?
- i. Does the use of the term [or an associated practice] acknowledge the ‘old has past’ and the ‘making of all things new’ dynamic?
- j. David Barr tells us that ‘in a world dominated by symbols of Roman power, John [the Revelator] nourishes an alternative imagination and thus effects the disassociation of his auditors from the values and the culture of empire.’²² In fact John encourages his readers to ‘come out of/from her’ (Rev 18:4) i.e. that which is associated with the power and prestige of Rome. How might association of this name [and/or practice] re-enforce the values and culture of Islam and actually encourage people not to ‘come out from her’?
- k. The consummated kingdom is an upside-down kingdom. How does a term or practice derived from the ‘right-side up’ kingdom of Islam with its emphasis on temporal power and territory, align or conflict with the New Jerusalem model?

5 Conclusion

The vision of the New Jerusalem was designed to raise the sights of a marginalized group of early Christians in the Roman Empire struggling to follow in the steps of The Overcomer. Some had bought into the ways of the empire with its lust for power and promises of eternity and peace [the *Pax Romana* and *Roma Aeterna*] and others

²² David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (The Storytellers Bible 1; Santa Rosa, Calif.; Polebridge, 1998), p. 178 cited by Ryan S. Schellenberg, ‘Seeing the World Whole: Intertextuality and the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22)’, in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 33 no 4 (Wint 2006), p. 467.

who had not bought in were fearful of the wrath of the Empire.²³ By the use of apocalyptic imagery, John instills in them another view of the ‘real world’, that is he gives them a new worldview, a description of what home really looks like. He puts last things first. In the words of Ryan Schellenberg, he displays to them ‘heaven on earth—sexuality without impurity, holiness without exclusion, prosperity without oppression, and civilization without pollution. John provides a world of wholeness that stands over against the conflicted lives of his auditors.’²⁴

This raises an important question: How does missiological strategy ‘X’ in the Muslim world do the same for its hearers?

²³ For the social/religious/political background of the Apocalypse and the response of Christians, see David A. deSilva, ‘The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts Within, Fears Without,’ in *Westminster Theological Journal* 54:2 (Fall 1992); Steven J. Friesen *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 201-4; Thomas B. Slater, ‘Context, Christology and civil disobedience in John’s Apocalypse’, in *Review & Expositor*, 106 no 1 (Winter 2009), pp. 51-65.

²⁴ Schellenberg, p. 476.